DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 044 792 EA 003 145

AUTHOR Perryman, John
TITLE Feeding the Nation's Children--Education's Job?
PUB DATE 12 Apr 70
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at National School Board Association Annual Meeting (30th, San Francisco, California, April 11-14, 1970)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70
DESCRIPTORS Educational Legislation, Educational Needs, *Educational Philosophy, *Food Service, Food Service Industry, *Lunch Programs, Nutrition, *Nutrition Instruction

ABSTRACT

Children who are hungry cannot be taught. To discharge successfully the responsibility of teaching entrusted to them, the schools must provide food for children's bodies as well as intellectual stimulation for their minds. This is expecially true of children from poverty-stricken homes. Although recent legislation provides free lunches and breakfasts for such children, these laws are subject to economic means tests and local controls; apply in some cases but not in others; and provide some foods and not others--all of which reduces the effectiveness of a free-foods program. Future programs should provide free lunches to all children as a necessary facet of free education. (RA)

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FEEDING THE NATION'S CHILDREN --

EDUCATION'S JOB?

Two years ago at a Seminar sponsored for School Administrators by American School Food Service Association at Vail, Colorado I made the following statement. "If you would know the future of school food service, look not to happenings in the food service industry, look not to changes in education itself. Look rather to developments in the socio-economic world around us." Naturally, I plan to agree with myself today or I would not be quoting myself.

LEGAL APPROACH

Only a few days ago, in our normally placid and tranquil city of Denver, thirty-two school buses were bombed in a Board of Education parking lot as a violent but eloquent expression of opposition to forced busing. The following day, in another incident related to the first only by the pressure of the days in which we live, the Board of Education of the second largest city in the State of Colorado was taken to Court. The cause: lack of school food service facilities in a substantial number of schools in Pueblo, Colorado.

Because of the socio-economic conditions in which school systems operate today, the question to which we are asked to address ourselves may already be academic and archaic. The question itself re-supposes that school administrators and boards of education have an option in the 1970's as to whether or not they will offer school food service as a part of their total program. The reality of the situation is that we no longer have such an option.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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As you unquestionably know, law suits are being filed against boards of education in communities from one end of the nation to the other where school food service is not available to children in every school. Clearly then the first aspect of our review of school food service today must be the legal one. I had supposed that the legal basis for enjoining boards of education in regard to school food service would be the stipulation in the National School Lunch Act that food service be provided free or at reduced price to those children who could not afford to pay the full price. On such a legal basis, it appeared to me that any school district could avoid such legal entanglement by removing itself from the National School Lunch Program altogether.

I have investigated this matter: I find that the National School Lunch Act is not always the basis for legal action. The actions which are being brought are based upon what can perhaps best be described as , "Man's inalienable right to equal opportunity." The philosophy behind such an approach is that no man, level of government or institution has the right to intercept or interrupt an available source of assistance offered by the Federal Government to the individual. As an example, if the Federal Government offers, let us say 15¢ per day per child, toward the expense of that child's nourishment while he is attending school, what right has any other individual to decline such assistance on behalf of the child? If this legal approach doesn't work, there is very likely another that will. Scores of boards of education from one end of the country to the other are being brought into court in search of decisions under the law which will proclaim for once and for all that school food service is in fact a part of education's job.

EDUCATIONAL ECONOMICS

Now that we have discussed the legitimacy of school food service from the legal standpoint, let's talk about it from the standpoint of what we might term "educational economics." Let us roughly divide the homes of our nation into two categories, poverty and non-poverty, and see the role of school food service as it applies in both instances.

If we turn first to the poverty home, we find that school food service has a dual role to play. First, it provides such nourishment for the child during the day that will enable him to be physically and mentally receptive to learning; second, in many many poverty home situations, school food service needs also to provide the incentive for coming to school in the first place. I remember traveling through the hill country of Jackson County, Tennessee. The summer heat lay heavy upon the mountain valleys, wasps droned with irritating freedom through the broken and unscreened windows of one room schools and I wondered what would ever serve as a stimulus to draw children into these unappealing surroundings. Usually it would not be the parents. Our discouraged school administrators told us of many home visits in the area, told us of imploring parents to send children to school, told us of parents who cared not at all if their children went to school , told us of parents who sometimes even actively opposed school.

As we drove down a dusty back road, we met a young boy of perhaps eight or nine years of age clad in a pair of bib overalls and probably nothing more. As we stopped to talk with him, he bashfully told us-- while digging his toes in the dust of the road--

that he was indeed on his way to school, that he had heard he could now get something to eat at school. When I asked the lad what he hoped to do when he grew up, he studied the patterns of dust welling up from his caked feet, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Oh, I don't know; I reckon I'll draw." As we drove on to visit another school, I exclaimed with enthusiasm on the marvels of human ambition and the ever-ready potential of education. The County Superintendent smiled at me sadly and said, "I am afraid the boy doesn't mean he will draw in the sense of art; he means he will draw in the sense of relief as his parents and grandparents have done before him."

Whether in mountain valley or concrete canyon, whether in the discouragement of the back country or the dispair of the ghetto, education provides the therapy that will break the syndrome of poverty, and food service belongs as a part of that education. It belongs as a way of getting a child to school in the first place with an average daily attendance and degree of health that will expose him to learning, and it belongs as a means of enabling a child to be receptive to learning, once exposed.

Let us turn now to the non-poverty home. As a matter of fact, let us turn to that community which I know best , the school district in which I live. This date of our meeting being early in the new year, my own tax statement is fresh in my memory. With a property tax bill on my own family residence in excess of $1600, approximately one-third of this amount went for all community services lumped together except education, and substantially in excess of $1000 or nearly two-thirds of the entire tax bill went for education. In other words, I was assessed nearly twice as much for the costs of schools in my neighborhood as for such other costs as road construction and

maintenance, police protection, fire protection and other such services all put together. It is not my purpose in using this example to express disapproval of the allocation of tax revenues in my school district or even to seriously question the amount of money involved. It is my purpose , however, to say that as a tax - payer and substantial contributor to the educational process in my community, I want the educational process to be effective. I want the child to be physically and mentally receptive to learning. I want to be sure the child has the fuel that he needs to accomplish the tasks and master the disciplines assigned to him during the day.

Unfortunately, we cannot assume that, just because a child comes from a home which can afford to buy adequat e food that the child really has adequate food. A U. S. Department of Agriculture study concluded in 1968 revealed that affluent Americans-- not needy Americans -- not needy Americans but affluent Americans-- were eating a worse diet today than they were ten years ago.

In 1955 sixty percent of the households studied ate what was considered a "good diet," that is a diet containing adequate nutrients meeting the recommended daily allowance. In 1965 only fifty percent of the households studied ate a "good diet."

In the food patterns of our people today we find again the heavy hand of the socio-economic conditions of our times. Our population continues its migration from the farm to the city, from a close family life with rather well regimented hours to modern family living with a definite trend toward "every fellow for himself." When families grew up on the fram, the eating of a variety of nutritionally sound foods in good quantity and at regular hours was virtually second-nature. In the helter-skelter

urban life of pre-cooked, pre-frozen, dehydrated, freeze-dried, highly refined grab-it-on-the-run foods of today, nutrient intake often suffers as a result. Food at school as a part of the educational process is an answer.

To my way of thinking, we can draw a parallel in the concept of educational investment, a parallel between school food service as an educational investment and the G. I. Bill as an educational investment. Probably more for reasons of compassion than for reasons of education, a grateful Congress passed the legislation at the cose of World War II enabling our veterans to complete their education with a very healthy financial lift from the Government. The results of this program have been spectacular.

In 1969, the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the G. I. Bill was celebrated. During that period over eleven million individuals received college and post-high school training. Of this number, according to the Veterans Administration, approximately sixty percent received a college education or approximately seven million individuals.

The cost of these educational benefits was about $20 billion.

This investment in the education of veterans has had a direct impact upon the American economy. According to figures released independently by both the Veterans Administration and the Department of Labor, a college graduate can expect to earn $250,000 more in his lifetime than a high school graduate. This means a veteran who graduated from college would pay nearly $40,000 more in income taxes than a veteran with a high school education. Approximately seven million veterans who received college diplomas as a direct result of the G. I. Bill have paid over $265 billion dollars in tax revenue, or more than ten times the total investment of the G. I.

Bill.

The results of the G. I. Bill not only helped millions of young men and women complete their educations but, by helping them to be more productive, creative and useful citizens, the cost of the program was returned manyfold. In the same way in my judgement, school food service, by helping to make more effective EVERY dollar we spend on education, also multiplies itself manyfold.

EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

Let us move now from the matter of education dollars to the matter of educational intake. I refer to the subject of nutrition education, a subject many schools talk about, but not many schools do much about. Nutrition education-- a knowledge of food, a knowledge of what to eat and how to eat and in what combination to eat it. The relationship of food to health, the relationship of food to figure, the relationship of food to physical attractiveness and mental alertness-- this can all be a part of school food service. No, I am not suggesting that a child will absorb such lessons by some magic process of osmosis simply because he walks through the cafeteria line in school, instead of approaching the drive-in window down the street. Nutrition education has to be a deliberate teaching effort with its own text materials carefully and consciously incorporated into curricula extant in the school. Nutrition education can and should be closely tied to the school food service operation which then becomes a living laboratory for lessons being taught, hopefully with the assistance and guidance of the school food service staff.

We are pathetically , tragically unimaginative in our approach to nutrition education-- it is a little wonder that the subject has not been a favorite one with faculty and students alike. If we can help teenage boys to translate nutrition education into muscles

and teenage girls to translate it into the swelling curves of womanhood, the pace of the action in the classroom is going to quicken appreciably. And speaking of womanhood, if we can help the teenage girl to realize that the entire nervous system of her baby may well be laid out before she even knows she is pregnant, these vital lessons of the body begin to take on whole new meanings, and both the act and the knowledge of feeding children becomes ever more perceptibly a part of education's job.

We teach driver education because it provides lessons for living. As a matter of fact, it may very well help the student keep on living. Nutrition education can very well have the same life-giving ingredient.

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Speaking of lessons for living, we come face-to-face with the new education for the 1970's and 80's -- the community center concept. While in many ways it is a misnomer to speak of this as a new concept, certainly the impetus grows for full utilization of school properties for all possible assistance to all possible segments of the community at all hours of the day or night during all seasons of the year. Along with this approach to education emerges ever more clearly the educational philosophy that the purpose of our schools is to train for the living of life itself. Can we doubt that both the classic and the vocational definitions of education are fading into the background as the humanistic definition assumes ever-greater prominence and acceptance? As we teach learning for living, what could be a more appropriate part of education's job than a knowledge of how to eat?

And now, ladies and gentlemen, inasmuch as I have spent several years as a college professor, I trust you will forgive me if I accede to the temptation to review. We commenced our deliberations this afternoon with the observation that the socio-economic developments of our day would determine the answer we sought even more than developments in food service or in education. From that point, we moved on to the costic-- if not soft-spoken-- observation that the entire question placed before us today might be both academic and outmoded. The very concept that food service in the schools of the 70's and 80's is an option rather than a requirement may be a hold-over from yesteryear that we have not quite cleansed from our thinking for the tomorrows. We proceeded from the legal ramifications of school food service to a consideration of the economic ramifications to a consideration of the educational ramifications. We have concluded with a question, not with a certainty. In the new concept of education as learning for living, what part of the educational process can be defined as beyond education's job?

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

There is one final thought I would like to leave with you today, a thought which is perhaps beyond the purview intended by the original question. If, in your thinking as in mine , we have established that food service at school is a part of education's job, then by all means it is a part of education's job for ALL children alike. This is to say that there should no more be an economic means test for the nutritional aspects of education, than there is for any other phase of education. We are passing through an intermediate, ridiculous and trying stage of food service in our schools which is both unsound and undesirable from an administrative standpoint. We are saying that some children are pauperized to the point that they may have a free or reduced price meal,

while other children are not. We are saying that we can distinguish between the have and have nots and can do so with subtleties and nuances unnoticed by anyone. While we are racking our brains for administrative procedures so secretive as to satisfy the CIA, have we all forgotten the characteristics of children themselves? Have we forgotten the curiosity, the braggadocio and -- indeed sometime the venom of children themselves? Do we for one moment doubt that one child is going to gloat to another that he does not have to pay for a meal while his neighbor does? A classmate of my Deputy's seven year old son exaulted to him that the classmate's sister owned the cafeteria and consequently, he-- classmate-- did not have to pay for lunch while my Deputy's son did. The administrative ramifications of an economic means test are impossible in relation to the individual child.

In relation to the hodge-podge and patchwork quilt of federal regulations, the economic means test approaches the extremeties of administrative absurdity . We have some food items which we can make available to some hungry children but not to others; we have some monies which we can make available to some hungry children and not to others. We have Section this of that Act and Section that of this Act which are applied one way in one state and another way in another, which in turn are applied one way in one school district and another way in another. Above and beyond the straining administrative labyrinth remains the overriding consideration that the stigma of pauperism will no more be removed from a free lunch than it was from free education until the food for thought or food for the stomach, as the case may be, is made available equally to one and all. This is a lesson which is not new. These are experiences

learned in our own country almost a century and one-half ago as we were struggling with the beginning of free, public universal education in our nation. As an example, after some experiences with public schools in Philadelphia, a labor union committee found them to be "extremely defective and inefficient." In the NATIONAL GAZETTE of 1830, the committee observed:

> "Their (the public schools) leading feature is pauperism! They are confined exclusively to the children of the poor, while there are, perhaps thousands of children whose parents are unable to afford for them a good private education, yet whose standing professions or connnections in society effectually exclude them from taking the benefit of a poor law . There are great numbers, even of the poorest parents, who hold a dependence on the public bounty to be incompatible with the rights and liberties of an American citizen, and whose deep and cherished consciousness of independence determines them rather to starve the intellect of their offspring than submit to become the objects of public charity."

We have only to strike the two words, "the intellect" to apply this same sensitivity of feeling to the free lunch of today. Unfortunately, many an American citizen abhors charity to the point that he would prefer to starve his offspring rather than submit to becoming the object of public charity.

It is the hypothesis of this statement that food service for the student during the educational day is a part of education's job. It is the hypothesis of this statement

that the whole student -- top, bottom and middle-- all go to school together. It is the hypothesis of this paper that this physical peculiarity of the anatomy applies equally to all students without regard to an economic means test.

Finally, it is the plea of this statement that, although we have all known for some year that the ankle bone is connected to the shin bone, and the shin bone to the knee bone and the knee bone to the thigh bone that we, as educators, finally accept the reality that the stomach bone is connected to the head bone and that the learning process somehow covers this distance.